

SPEECH MADE BY GOVERNOR DOYLE BEFORE MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE, March 2002

“The State of the Tribes Address”

Honorable Rick Doyle, Governor, Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point

Good Morning, I bring greetings from Sipayik.

I had two choices this morning, my war club or my peace pipe, but I am here to make peace.

Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Rick Doyle, my traditional title is Sakom, but I am now called Governor of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point. The Passamaquoddy are proud members of the Wabanaki people. I am honored to be the guest of the Maine Legislature. This is a historic occasion and a historic opportunity for the Passamaquoddy people and the people of Maine. My hope is that this is the beginning of a new era of cooperation, trust, and partnership as we move forward and look to the future. While our past has been colored by distrust, we are willing to walk forward, together in friendship to help raise the quality of life of my people and all the people of Maine. My people have lived in Maine and parts of Canada for more than 500 generations. We were once the most predominant people in this area living in harmony with Great Mother, receiving her bounty and protecting the watershed. We lived off the mountains, the water, the woods, and the land. We were fishermen in the summer and hunters in the winter. Great Mother provided for us and we were there to nurture, protect, and preserve her bounty. We have a spiritual connection to the earth and have always viewed ourselves as caretakers of the land, river, and Great Mother.

We believe that everything in nature is interconnected, the water, the land, the people, the plants, and the animals. When we pick sweet grass, we do so blade by blade to honor the spirit of each blade. We then clean the sweet grass in the field so that the seeds may fall back into the field, where nature intended them to fall so that the field can continue.

It has always been so with our people. We harvest only what we need from the land. We view each animal and plant separately based on its environment and connection to nature and US. In turn, we look to the land and Great Mother for signs of danger and injury and work to protect her. In that way, all of creation can replenish itself.

From the beginning of European settlement, we held out the hand of friendship, first with the French, then the English, and finally with the American colonists. We assisted French explorers who sought our knowledge of the area as well as our help with their new settlements.

When the English arrived, we signed treaties with the understanding that we would share the land with them. We shared the land and Great Mother's bounty with the new colonists. When the new colonists arrived, we were there when they needed us.

In the hopes of protecting some of our land base, we signed a treaty with the Commonwealth and later with the State of Maine. The U.S. Congress never ratified these treaties. These treaties gave us title to several islands, a 23,000-acre township, and several smaller tracts of land, including 10 acres at Pleasant Point, which through our efforts was later increased. Despite the lack of federal protections, the tribe followed the tenets of this treaty even after the State of Maine was created in 1820.

Three years after the State of Maine was made a state, our people were given non-voting representation in the Maine Legislature. Through these representatives we were able to secure the establishment of the Passamaquoddy Trust Fund to finance emergency aid for the needy. The fund was financed from the proceeds of timber sales, grass, and power rights on our land. Such aid was desperately needed to help our people who were in dire straits. Despite being on the rail lines, our people were not allowed to take advantage of the situation and remained reliant on hunting, fishing, trapping, basket making, and other traditional arts. Interest from this fund was paid to the Indian Agents who were supposed to be looking out for our welfare. Instead, we were given the leftovers, thus beginning a long cycle of welfare dependency. Where was the State of Maine when we needed your help and protection? Again, we had been taken advantage of by those we trusted.

Later, in the 1960s, we discovered that part of our land was sold or leased without federal consent. This discovery set off a legal battle that resulted in federal recognition for the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples and a claim by the tribes to nearly two-thirds of the State of Maine. Despite legal victory after legal victory, we sought compromise with the state. The future of Maine as a whole was at stake. Government functions, businesses, and people's lives were held in the balance as long as this court case was being pursued. The result of that compromise was the Maine Indian Settlement Act, under which we operate now.

Unfortunately, the Settlement Act has not achieved its goal. It is a failed experiment in my mind. We seek only to maintain and exercise our sovereignty to protect our way of life. The settlement gave us more authority over our internal matters and allowed us to keep our federal recognition. However, it also left open questions over jurisdiction. As called for in the Settlement Act, I would urge the Maine Tribal State Commission to review the Settlement Act and to suggest changes to help bring it into a new era and clarify the questions of jurisdiction that were left open.

These questions have led us to our current situation. We want to ensure that we have clean water. Plain and simple. The current court cases and arguments made by the paper companies are not about documents to us. It is about our right to clean water. It is about the health and safety of our people.

I am fighting for my people's right to continue our traditions and way of life without fear of poisons or toxins in our water. We want to continue to be able to fish, swim, canoe, sustain ourselves, and harvest our medicines. In sum, we ask that we be allowed to continue to practice our traditions and culture as we have for more than 500 generations. Polluters have been discharging toxins into the river that make the fish unsafe to eat, the water unsafe to swim in, and that threaten the very vitality of the river itself. It is my duty not only to my people, but also to Mother Earth to protect the river and the water. That is why we have fought so hard and vigorously on the issue of water quality. If I must be imprisoned to protect the river, then so be it. This is worth fighting for. Money and power are fleeting. Nature is forever. My people are forever. We will not back down. We will continue to fight for our right to clean water, no matter how long, and no matter what the cost.

We are encouraged by the Governor's offer of negotiations to find a way to solve this matter outside of court. It has always been my hope that we could settle the problems between the Passamaquoddy, the State, and the other parties involved through negotiation. However, we must make it clear that our main goal is the preservation of the bays, rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds in order to protect the health and safety of our people. We hope that these negotiations will open a new chapter in our relationship with the State of Maine: Despite the problems of the past, we seek cooperation and consensus. We see progress and a growing understanding of our concerns on this issue and others. Together, we can help to protect our State's natural resources and the lifeblood of our culture: the river and its watershed. Together, we can begin to build the foundations for a new relationship between the Passamaquoddy and the people of Maine.

From this debate, I see many opportunities for my people and the people of Maine. Our needs are many. Since the time the first Europeans came to our lands, we have become ever more dependent and less self-sufficient. What started as a desire for guns, powder, and iron has developed into the creation of a welfare state on tribal lands. We need to break this vicious cycle and develop new opportunities for Indian people here in the State. Ways that will help my people beat back disease, poor health, poverty and substance abuse. The list of social ills goes on and on.

In sum, we seek hope for a better and healthier tomorrow. Hope that there will be new jobs. Hope that our waters will be clean and healthy. Hope that our children can grow up free from abuse and the chains of dependency.

The new relationship may also lead to the development of other tribal resources. We are eager to work with our neighbors in Washington County to help spur economic development in the region. Whatever the relationship grows into, statewide or locally, it needs to help me and my people to break the cycle of dependency. We want to become self-sufficient. I believe that was part of the purpose behind the Settlement Act, to give tribes the means and self-determination to help ourselves.

Throughout history, the Passamaquoddy have been there when the people and the United States needed us. Our people fought in many wars for the United States to protect our country, our land, and our way of life. From the Revolutionary War to the present, my people have fought valiantly to protect our nation. This despite the fact we were not granted the right to vote in Maine until 1954. This is the first time in 182 years that tribal leaders have addressed the Maine Legislature. We have always taken great pride in fighting for our nation to preserve its liberty. My uncle, who recently passed to the next world, was a veteran of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. I know personally the type of sacrifice that he and others like him from my tribe made to preserve this country of ours.

Even in today's conflicts, our presence is noticed. The U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, through a friend of the Tribes, have requested a Passamaquoddy flag to be flown by one of its pilots during a bombing mission against the Taliban and al Qaeda. Our tribe has a long history of fighting to protect this nation and its liberty. We are proud to provide this symbol to our fighting forces overseas and are always prepared to provide whatever assistance is necessary to protect this great nation of ours against all attacks.

We look forward to this opportunity for a new relationship with great expectations. We enter these negotiations with Governor King and the paper companies with the hope that our waters will be protected. We do this despite the challenges of the past. Whenever we were asked, we came willingly to the aid of the State. We ask for your assistance now. Help us to protect our waters. Help us to grow economically. Help us to protect our traditions and culture. And, most importantly, let's help each other to become better neighbors and partners.